

MARRIAGE AMONG /KUNG BUSHMEN

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ceremony is the avoidance of the parents, which is symbolic of the incest taboo. Any (preferably young) kinswoman who is tall enough and strong enough, whether she herself is married or not, and whether or not she has the joking relation with the bride, may carry the bride; and any may attend her. Only the mother absolutely must not do so. Likewise the groom's father must not attend him. Neither pair of parents go to sit by the wedding fire, for they must not sit near their son's wife or daughter's husband, nor speak to them. Guests of mature years might go and sit by the wedding fire only if they have the joking relationship with both the bride and the groom. Very young guests, such as we saw at /Nai's and /Gunda's fire, may go, whether they joke or not with the bride and groom, because the avoidances are not stringently observed with young children.

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Termination of marriage and remarriage

Widows and widowers are not avoided in any special way because of their widowhood.

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If her husband dies, a young widow usually returns to her own parents or lives with one of her own siblings, but, if her people are dead, or if it is her preference, she may stay on with her deceased husband's people. It is the duty of her HuBr to hunt for her if she needs his support.

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Several possibilities are open to a young widower: rarely he might stay with his deceased wife's parents or siblings; more likely he would return to his own parents or siblings; and, when he marries again, he goes into matrilocal residence with the new bride. In any case, a man is responsible for his wife's parents and young siblings, and, if they depended on him for support, he would take them with him. They would be likely to prefer, however, to live with an adult son, daughter, or sibling of their own if they had any.

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Old widowers or widows whose own parents are dead usually live with either a son or daughter, or perhaps with their own sibling—as they wish.

The surviving spouse is free to marry again within the regulations of the extended incest taboo, which applies to all marriages.

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Parents would arrange the subsequent marriage of a widowed boy or girl. Adults may make their own arrangements directly. My impression was that persons might be considered fully adult somewhere in their middle or late twenties.

An adult man takes the initiative and asks the woman to marry him. Robert Dyson in the 1951 expedition learned that one way for a man to ask a woman to marry him is to present her with a bow and arrow. If she accepts it she indicates her willingness to consider his suit.

No restriction of time is put upon the remarriage of a widower, but a widow should not remarry until one rainy season has passed. She is then considered 'clean' and may marry again. Toma said, 'The rain washes (/num) the death away from the widow.' /Num is the gesture of wiping a dish with one finger and then licking the finger. /Ti/kay of Band 9 said that some men wait for a rainy season to pass, but that others would be pleased the husband was dead and, without waiting, say, 'This is my chance.' One interpreter understood that the widow had to take off her kaross and spend a night out, letting the rain fall on her, but Toma said this was not what

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582 Even Gai had been married once before, when he was in his teens, to a wife not yet eleven, as most Bushmen marry at a very early age. A Bushman girl can be betrothed before she is weaned, while she still lies on her back and waves her tiny feet. When she is eight or nine she marries and her young husband, who is probably in his late teens, comes to live all or part of the time with her family. He will not have intercourse with her until she reaches puberty—she must pass her first menstruation and her breasts must show. They then [591] live together as man and wife, always with her family, as Bushmen are matrilocal until the couple has borne three children, the sign of adulthood, or, if they are not so blessed, until they reach the age when most people have three children. Then, if they wish, they may live with the husband's family.

It is said that when a man raises his wife, feeds her, and cares for her, the two enjoy their youth together, she is the more his, and a more stable marriage results than if she were allowed to grow up wild and free and perhaps make a hasty choice of too young a husband (one of her own age) in the passion of her adolescence. An early marriage also ensures that the girl will be a first wife, a more desirable and authoritative position than that of a second, or co-wife. The girl's parents benefit from an early union as well, for the young man hunts for them and the meat he kills goes to their band.

This system may be good for women, but it is hard on young men, who often must endure desire for years and years, waiting all through their teens and early twenties before they can possess their wives. One young man among the Kung Bushmen had been thirty when his wife had died, and he had found no one else to marry except an infant girl. When we knew him he had been waiting five years for his wife to grow up, and at that time she was only about seven (younger than his son, who was about eleven); and when he

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green-leafed vegetables, and sometimes many of the people³⁶¹ of the large extended bands come together to live, to hold⁶²¹ important ceremonies which require many people, and to enjoy each other's company. Sometimes they separate into very small bands because they can now go anywhere they wish, each family going to the part of the veld where the type of food grows that the family most enjoys. There is water every³¹² where, in small seasonal waterholes, in shallow salt pans, in hollow trees, and the people thrive and grow quite fat. One of their favorite foods, one that grows in great abundance at²²² this season, is a ground nut called tsi, which grows on a trailing vine and is so fat that if you leave a kernel of it on a piece of paper it will leave a greasy stain. Tsi is regarded by the Kung Bushmen as a very powerful food, one of the pow-^[778]erful veld foods in which there is a special essence, something mysterious and magic which gives them a life force all their own so that it would be dangerous to eat them during the year if this life force were not first subdued or not first integrated with the life force of the people. These foods are⁷⁷⁸ the mainstays of the Bushmen's diet, and are fat; and every⁷⁸⁹ year people in their child-bearing years, when they consider themselves subject to harm, protect themselves against these foods by a ritual act.

The act of protection is called *choa*, and it is interesting because it differs from the protective rituals performed by agricultural peoples to save their crops or animals from harm, or to cause their increase. The Bushmen *choa* themselves not^[842] to protect their fertility, for decrease in the number of children is not a problem to them, but to make sure that they, the young adults and mainstays of the community, will not get thin and starve.

Those whom Bushmen call "old people," adults who have⁷⁸⁹ had three children, are expected to protect themselves and⁸⁸⁵ also to protect young people of the same sex.